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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABIDJAN 001228

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KINSHASA PASS TO BRAZZAVILLE

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TAGS: PREL IV

SUBJECT: COTE D'IVOIRE: INITIAL REACTIONS OF POLITICAL
CLASS TO UNSCR 1721

REF: SECSTATE 181682

Classified By: Deputy PolEcon Chief Ervin Massinga, Reasons
1.4 (b, d)

¶1. (C) Summary. The streets of Abidjan were calm in the wake of the adoption of UNSCR 1721 (reftel) and the business of the country's economic capital went on without incident. Ambassador Hooks and Emboffs sought out the initial impressions of major political groups and figures, and found among the President, his allies, the Prime Minister's advisors and major opposition figures alike, a general consensus that the ambiguities of the text will make actual exercise of executive authority by Prime Minister Banny difficult. President Gbagbo expressed privately his appreciation to the United Nations Security Council and U.S. for preserving the Constitution (and source of his power) intact, and publicly said the Prime Minister would not/not wield the power to appoint civil and military chiefs. FPI leader Affi N'Guessan echoed the President's appreciation for a somewhat ambiguous text in a meeting with Emboffs. RDR leader Alassane Ouattara expressed disappointment in the outcome, arguing its ambiguities would prevent effective advancement of the peace process. Prime Minister Banny's Political Advisor expressed disappointment with the resolution's text as well, and expressed alarm at the President's initial moves to undercut the effectiveness of the PM's Office. Indeed, the text is sufficiently ambiguous that all the parties can read into it what they want. End Summary.

President Gbagbo

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¶2. (C) Ambassador Hooks received a call from President Gbagbo the evening of November 1, thanking the United States for its role in bringing to fruition a "balanced" resolution. Gbagbo remarked that the text of UNSCR 1721 was too confused and ambiguous to be workable, but clearly preferred it to the French original.

¶3. (U) The President during the early afternoon of November 2 appeared on national television to thank the International Community and the United Nations for sustaining the sovereignty of Cote d'Ivoire and preserving its Constitution intact (news report sent to Desk via unclass email). He also said unambiguously that the Prime Minister would not/not nominate civil or military leaders as mentioned in 1721, as the President alone is empowered to do so under the Ivorian constitution. The President promised to address the nation in the coming days to present his plan for ending the political crisis and division of the country.

Pro-Gbagbo Forces

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¶4. (C) Deputy Pol/Econ Chief met with FPI President Affi N'Guessan at his home on the morning of November 2. Claiming he had not read the text of UNSCR 1721 (quite possible, as news of its passage came late in the night of November 1 and was subject to widely differing analysis by morning dailies and international radio news programs), N'Guessan opened by saying he could not speak for the FPI before the party had the opportunity to review the text collectively, and offered a relatively subdued initial analysis. Arguing that advancing the peace and reconciliation process depends on political will, N'Guessan then placed the onus squarely on the New Forces to unblock the current impasse. Effectively avoiding the question of PM Banny's role as an executive independent of President Gbagbo, N'Guessan responded to Emboff's question concerning the prospects for restarting the audiences foraines concept, as noted in UNSCR 1721, by blaming the New Forces for demanding an unacceptable carte blanche in the identity/nationality arena. He then presented his now-familiar litany of "broken promises" by the New Forces to disarm (that they would do so if they received amnesty, if N'Guessan himself ceded the Prime Minister's slot, if Ouattara were allowed to stand in presidential elections, if an identity/nationality process were undertaken, etc.). N'Guessan pointed to the creation of 133 new judgeships as a good start towards an effective audiences foraines process, in which judges can make determinations of nationality in security and away from the influences of the armed New Forces, but he stressed judicial decisions would have to be made in an "orderly" environment. Asked as to how the U.S. and the international community can help sustain the peace process during the mandate of UNSCR 1721, N'Guessan echoed President Gbagbo's sentiments in implicitly thanking the U.S. for helping to fend off the overly-explicit French

ABIDJAN 00001228 002 OF 003

draft, and then promising to work together with the U.S. (a nation, he noted, that had not been the previous colonizers) in the coming year. Asked about the calm in streets, the former Prime Minister responded by saying youth parties associated with the FPI are "pursuing their objectives peacefully and attempting to avoid provoking their opponents."

¶5. (C) FESCI (the student group at the center of many violent demonstrations) leader Serges Koffi declined to meet with Emboffs, sending lieutenants in his stead. Augustin Mian, 2nd Secretary General of the organization and the effective #3, repeated familiar criticisms of the audience foraines, the New Forces (and did so without N'Guessan's Qlan), but he did allow that the group was reasonably happy because the Constitution remained untouched and because UNSCR 1721 (which they had not read) was sufficiently ambiguous to prevent effectively transferring power to Prime Minister Banny. Harping on the excesses of the rebellion, they categorically rejected the concept of any compromise that would allow the restart of the audiences foraines, saying that the process would simply allow the New Forces to put on the voter rolls "Malians and Burkinabe imported to tilt elections in their favor." Asked how the U.S. and the rest of the international community could help encourage the peace process, FESCI could only offer that international partners of Cote d'Ivoire ought to condemn vigorously the rebellion. While the rhetoric was predictable, Emboffs received a relatively cordial reception at FESCI HQ. The group said it and other groups supportive of the President were not in the streets because they are "pursuing their objectives peacefully," and, more tellingly, that they "work within the 'Patriotic Galaxy,'" effectively taking orders from the FPI leadership (see para 4).

Opposition

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¶6. (C) Alassane Ouattara (ADO) was relatively pessimistic in conversation with the Ambassador on November 2, saying Gbagbo would never cede authority over the armed forces and that the ambiguities of the text would prove fatal to the aspirations

expressed in the new UNSCR resolution. ADO did not see the Prime Minister being able to effectively wield executive authority nor did he envision elections being held during the timeframe laid out in UNSCR 1721.

7) (C) Deputy Pol/Econ Chief met with RDR Mayor of Abobo (an Abidjan suburb with 1.6 million inhabitants) Adama Tounkana on November 2. A close Advisor to ADO, Tounkana was animated in discussions with Emboffs, focusing nearly exclusively on identification/nationality as the central factor in the political crisis, and citing the fact that he himself, Prime Minister Banny and former Prime Minister Diarra (put in place by the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement) all lack national identity cards as evidence that under current law it is too difficult for average Ivorians to establish identity and nationality. He said plainly that UNSCR 1721 clearly and unambiguously gives executive authority to PM Banny, and that Banny has only to take and employ the powers provided. Referring to disarmament, Tounkana said the issue is simple, quoting G. Soro: "New Forces soldiers will happily trade a kalashnikov for an identity card." He threatened in no uncertain terms that RDR youth groups and other opponents of the FPI would counter any moves by Gbagbo-supporters and FPI allies should they take to the streets violently, and cited recent examples of his supporters' willingness to do so.

Prime Minister's Office

8) (C) Contacted by cell phone while he was en route to Yamoussoukro on November 3, Yaya Dembele, Political Advisor to Prime Minister Banny, expressed some frustration and disappointment with UNSCR 1721. Having spoken to the Prime Minister prior to his trip, he and his team reportedly believe that the resolution should have been made clearer. The ambiguities in the text leave it open to "diverse interpretations", and manipulation by the President's camp. According to Dembele, the constitution should have been suspended during the mandate of UNSCR 1721. Of particular concern was the announcement by the President of a series of discussions and fora to be held with unions, women's groups, youth associations, religious groups, etc. concerning the peace process. The PM's camp believes this to be an effort to circumvent the national forum to be organized under the PM's auspices as called for in UNSCR 1721.

ABIDJAN 00001228 003 OF 003

9) (C) Comment. Streets were calm in Abidjan in the wake of UNSCR 1721's adoption, and all actors we spoke to seemed to believe this state of affairs would continue for the time being. Pro-FPI parties were reasonably satisfied with the outcome. While the opposition appears to be somewhat disappointed, they seem to be buoyed by the general perception that their ability to counter FPI-initiated street violence has grown, while the President and FPI's ability to bring forces into the street has diminished. The Prime Minister finds himself immediately faced by Gbagbo's efforts to undercut him. We will continue follow-up outreach to various elements of the political class, particularly the New Forces, as reaction to the adoption of UNSCR 1721 unfolds.

Hooks